



FINDING TRUE NORTH

There's more than meets the eye at North Island, the Seychelles island hideaway known as a sanctuary for the rich and famous. Kimberly Rosbe goes beyond the stunning exterior to find the retreat's worthy raison d'être.

After a month-long safari odyssey across Tanzania and Kenya in celebration of my mother's 75th birthday, we were Seychelles-bound as our East African grand finale. Chopping the 30 kilometres from Mahé, we exchanged knowing glances as our pilot pointed to a granite outcrop rising from the equatorial cobalt and turquoise Indian Ocean: mythical North Island.

Century-old Aldabra giant tortoises dotted the grassy helipad, welcoming us to their otherworldly playground as we descended between towering palms and jet-black boulders. Stepping onto this tropical Eden, the island began to reveal its soul.

The world's ultimate hideaway for the famous or privileged, North Island's 11 sprawling oceanfront Presidential Villas blend seamlessly into the jungle. All feature vast terraces framed by hand-cut casuarina trunks, plunge pools, thatched cabanas and palatial indoor/outdoor ensuites graced with melodious capiz shell chandeliers.

North Island's team redefines personalised service. There are no schedules, no menus; only private experiences tailored to dreams. Guests can picnic on Honeymoon Beach; stargaze in cocoons; set sail at sunset; snorkel secret reefs; and devour ocean-to-table feasts. But the real story of North Island delves deeper than pleasure and barefoot luxury.

Reclaimed and revitalised

Climbing Spa Hill to the panoramic zenith of the island, managing director Bruce Simpson offers a hand to pull me up a sheer granite boulder. “North is my jewel,” he tells me, noting that he has been shaping the island’s vision for 14 years.

As a coconut plantation abandoned in the 1970s, the uninhabited islet had become infested with feral animals and invasive plants, destroying native flora and fauna. In 1997, Africa’s sustainable, ecotourism powerhouse, Wilderness Safaris, bought the island outright with the goal to rehabilitate the habitat and create a conservation paradise funded by high-end tourism. But North had run wild with neglect and required a real maverick and true bush man to tackle the formidable venture. Bruce was their man. Moving to the island in 2005, he has been the leader of North’s family ever since and an integral part of the island’s unique development. Still, Bruce is the first to insist North’s transformation has been a massive collaborative effort.



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01 The main pool 02 A giant tortoise visits a villa 03 Luxe finishings in a Presidential Villa 04 Stand-up paddleboarding around the island 05 Picnic on East Beach 06 A semi-open bathroom in a Presidential Villa

A higher purpose

This ambitious mandate to develop a nascent environmental initiative in the middle of the Indian Ocean was aptly named ‘the Noah’s Ark project’. After eradicating rats and incompatible vegetation, then planting thousands of indigenous seedlings representing over 200 plants, the reintroduction of local Seychelles species commenced. The homecoming included a nod to the Galápagos with 20 Aldabra giant tortoises imported to breed and increase the existing dwindling population. Usually weighing in excess of 150 kilograms and among the longest living animals on the planet, approximately 90 of these rare creatures now roam North. A host of birds also started to return, led by the elegant white-tailed tropicbirds and the Seychelles blue pigeon. One of the proudest moments for conservationists occurred in 2007 when 25 Seychelles white-eyes were released onto the island, brought back from the brink of extinction to number five times that population today.

Green turtles and the critically endangered hawksbill return year after year to nest on protected shores. Coconuts on sticks in the sand mark the place and date of expected births.

The allure of North Island transcends its reputation as an elite escape. Its raison d’être is embodied by the fact that,

next year, the rare Seychelles magpie-robin will be introduced into this wildlife sanctuary. North stands as an unrivalled conservation utopia synchronised with the ultimate barefoot luxury experience. And every guest fortunate enough to ‘find their true North’ becomes a part of this higher purpose. ♦

Travel file

Accommodation & Experience
north-island.com

Getting there
Etihad flies to Mahé via Abu Dhabi. Helicopter transfers are available to North Island. etihad.com